Ellis ap Griffith (c. 1427–1489)

Origin and Family

Born c. 1427. Died 1489.

Father: Griffith ap Einion (c. 1382–c. 1450)
Mother: Lowrie verch Tudor ap Griffith Vychan
Spouse: Margaret verch Jenkyn ap Ievan of Bodidris (c. 1442–c. 1515)

Children:[1]

1. David Lloyd ap Ellis (c. 1487–c. 1570)
2. John Wynn ap Ellis, of Bryn Eglwys, ancestor of the Wynnes of Byrntangor
3. Richard ap Ellis
4. Jenkin ap Ellis
5. Tudor ap Ellis, of Llysfassi
6. Ievan Lloyd ap Ellis, of Rhagat, Edeirnion
7. Griffith Lloyd ap Ellis, ancestor of the Lloyds of Carrog
8. Margaret, married first Ievan ap Howell, second Howell Vychan ap Howell, and third John Tervor
9. Angharad, married Maurice ap John, of Clennenen
10. Gwenhwyfar, married John Eyton, son of Rhuabon
11. Lowry, married Reinalt, of Branas

From Rodney Horace Yale[1]: “Ellis ap Griffith, of Gwyddelwern, and *jure uxoris*, of Plas-yn-Yale, Farmer (lessee) of the office of Raglot of the commote of Penllyn, 12 Edward IV (1485), married Margaret, one of the Bodidras family, and daughter and heir of Jenkyn ap Ievan, of Plas-yn-Yale, Bryn Eglwys, Co. Denbigh. By the heiress of Plas-yn-Yale, Ellis ap Griffith, who is stated to have died in 1489, had issue, 4 sons and 7 daughters.”[1]

The Latin term *jure uxoris* means “in right of a wife”, so in this context it means Ellis ap Griffith took possession of Plas-yn-Yale through marriage. Plas-yn-Yale was also known as Bodanwydog, but Bodanwydog is now a neighboring farm to Plas-yn-Yale. Ellis ap Griffith is the last of seven generations from Cors-y-Gedol, and the first of four generations that would live at Plas-yn-Yale.

Ellis ap Griffith’s exact year of birth is not known. However, he served as a juror for the County of Merioneth in 1448, and as jurors were required to be at least 19 years old, he must have been born before 1429.

Ellis ap Griffith’s maternal grandfather was Tudur ap Gruffudd, brother of the famous Owain Glyndŵr, Prince of Wales, son of Prince Gruffudd Fychan II.[8,9]

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Occupation and Property

Through his mother, Lowrie, Ellis ap Griffith was the legal heir to the royal claims of the House of Powys Fadog. Following the death of his grandfather, Tudur ap Gruffudd (brother of Owain Glyndŵr), and the subsequent forfeiture of the family's lands during the Welsh Revolt, Ellis successfully petitioned the English Crown to reclaim his ancestral inheritance. By demonstrating his loyalty to the Yorkist King Edward IV, Ellis was confirmed as a tenant-in-chief of the Barony of Gwyddelwern, holding the 10,000-acre estate directly from the Crown.[8]

To reinforce his claim, Ellis adopted his mother's family Powys Fadog "black lion" coat of arms.

The Barony of Gwyddelwern lies just a few miles from Plas-yn-Yale.

Ellis's family would later be included in Shakespeare's play Henry IV, with his maternal great-uncle being the rebel character Owen Glendower.

According to local historian L. Gordon Sherratt[11], Plas-yn-Yale originally was a wooden structure but was rebuilt by Ellis ap Griffith. "About the year 1450, Ellis ap Griffith took as his wife Margaret, and by using the proceeds from the sale of part of his inheritance 'did build for his wife a new house at Yale, better than that to which she had been accustomed.' And so begins the development of the present house built in stone –a new development for hereabouts – said to have been the first so built in Denbighshire, and certainly one of the earliest in North Wales."[11]

Modern-day Plas-yn-Yale (or Plas-yn-Ial) as shown in this recent picture, is now a 35-acre working farm with "self-catering bed & breakfast" accommodations.

Above the entrance is the Yale Coat of Arms, created in 1821. When Ellis ap Griffith rebuilt the house around 1450,[11] he may have chosen to use his paternal Desmond-style Coat of Arms rather than the "Black Lion" Coat of Arms. If so, it would have closely resembled this reconstruction:

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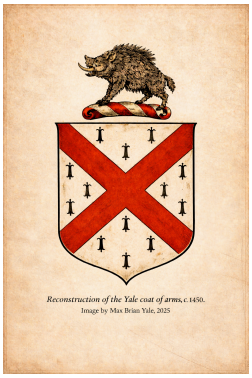
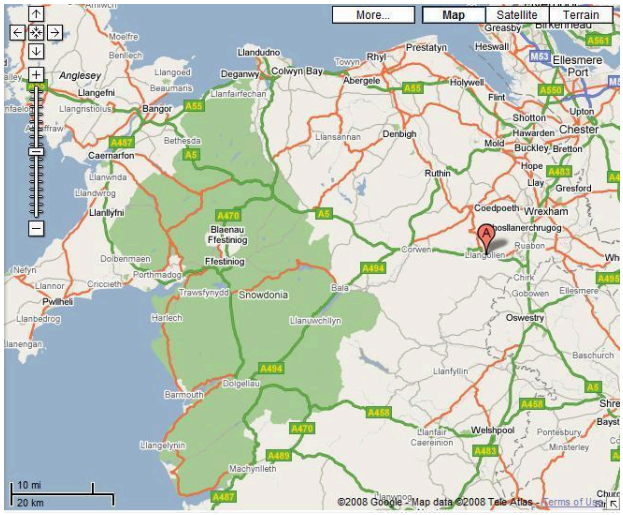


See “Further Readings” for more information on the Yale Coat of Arms.



Plas-yn-Yale is marked “A” on the map above. Cors-y-Gedol is near Barmouth on Cardigan Bay, about 40 miles west.

Ellis ap Griffith was Farmer of the office of Raglot. This was a powerful position and had nothing to do with farming. As Raglot, Ellis acted as the King's lieutenant or governor for the district of Penllyn. He was responsible for maintaining the public peace, presiding over local legal matters, and ensuring the collection of royal rents and revenues. It was a position of high trust, usually held by the most influential nobleman in the region.[2]

Ellis ap Griffith was also well known as a patron of the arts and literature. During his life he possessed the historically important White Book of Rhydderch, which he obtained from his grandparents Einion ap Griffith and Tangwystl, daughter of Rhydderch ab Ieuan.[4] See Einion ap Griffith for more information on this ancient manuscript, which is in the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth.

The Yales of Plas-yn-Yale have been extinct in the male line for many years. After four generations, the American ancestral line left Plas-yn-Yale for estates in Chester and then to New Haven, Conn. The last Yale descendant who lived in Plas-yn-Yale was Sarah Yale, who died in 1821. However, the next owner, William Corbet, “took the name and arms of Yale by Royal License in 1867, in compliance with the will of Sarah Yale”.[3]

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End of Life

Ellis ap Griffith died in 1489.[1] His large estate was distributed to his sons in accordance with the Welsh custom of gavelkind, with David Lloyd ap Ellis obtaining Plas-yn-Yale. His wife Margaret ferch Jenkins, who was much younger than Ellis, died in 1515.

Research Notes

Online Genealogy References:
WikiTree ID: Ap_Gruffydd-60
FamilySearch ID: M9JZ-47T
Wikipedia: Ellis ap Griffith

Further Reading:

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- Yale, Max Brian. *Yale Family Coat of Arms* - Origin and History. *Max Brian Yale Genealogical Collection*, 2025

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2. Williams-Jones, Keith. “The Merioneth Lay Subsidy Roll 1292-3”, Cardiff, Wales: University of Wales Press, 1976

3. Nicholas, Thomas. Annals and Antiquities of the Counties and County Families of Wales, London, England: J and W Rider, 1872

4. Matonis, Ann T.E. Gutun Owain and his orbit: The welsh bardic grammar and its cultural context in Northeast Wales: The Welsh Bardic Grammar in Northeast Wales, 2004

5. Archaeologia Cambrensis Journal ser 3 v 15, London, England, 1869

6. National Library of Wales. White Book of Rhydderch. (no date)

7. Nettleton, George Henry. The Yale Pageant, New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1916.

8. Burke, Bernard. "A genealogical and heraldic dictionary of the landed gentry of Great Britain & Ireland for 1852". Colburn and Co., Publishers. pp. 1662–1663–1664.

9. Burke, Bernard. "A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry of Great Britain & Ireland", 1886 pp. 2060–2061.

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10. Lloyd, Jacob Youde William (1881). "The History of the Princes, the Lords Marcher, and the Ancient Nobility of Powys Fadog: And the Ancient Lords of Arwystli, Cedewen, and Meirionydd". T. Richard, Printers. p. 211.

11. Sherratt, L. Gordon. “Some Account of Plas-yn-Yale and the Yale Family”, 1972 Manuscript

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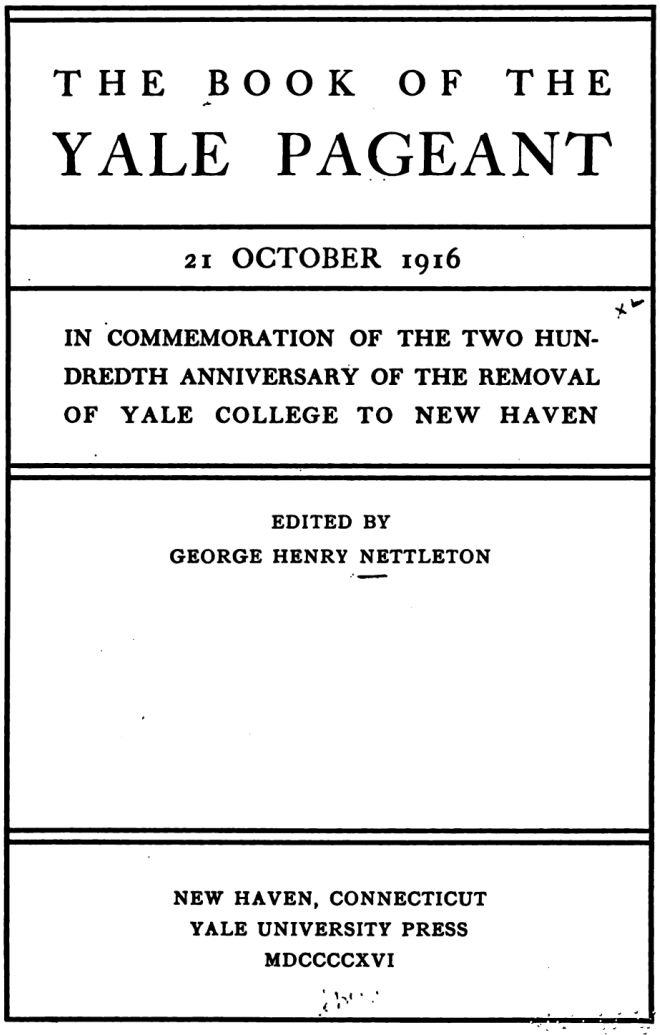
Attachment: The Yale Pageant

In 1916, in commemoration of the two hundred year anniversary of the founding of Yale University in New Haven, the college put together an elaborate play “The Yale Pageant”[7]. The play begins with a prelude representing the marriage of Ellis ap Griffith to Margaret verch Jenkyn ap Ievan. Here is the prelude to this charming play:



THE BOOK OF THE
YALE PAGEANT

21 OCTOBER 1916

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE TWO HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE REMOVAL OF YALE COLLEGE TO NEW HAVEN

EDITED BY
GEORGE HENRY NETTLETON

NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT
YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS
MDCCCCXVI

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BANNERET MAN AT ARMS MAN AT ARMS BANNERET
MAN AT ARMS MAN AT ARMS MAN AT ARMS MAN AT ARMS

SENESCHAL
EINION AP IORWERTH

SILENTARY
LLEWELYN AP MADOC

STEWARD
RHYS AP OWEN

PAGE PAGE PAGE PAGE
PAGE PAGE PAGE PAGE

MARGARET BODIDRIS AP IENKYN

IENKYN AP IEVAN
(*her father*)

TUDOR AP IEVAN
(*her uncle*)

BRIDESMAID BRIDESMAID BRIDESMAID BRIDESMAID
BRIDESMAID BRIDESMAID BRIDESMAID BRIDESMAID

EFA AP DYFED
(*her mother, in a litter*)

PRIEST OF THE HOUSEHOLD

WOMAN OF THE BED CHAMBER
GENWHYFER AP OWEN

WOMAN OF THE BED CHAMBER
MALI AP VYCHAN

WOMAN OF THE BED CHAMBER
NESTA AP OWEN

WOMAN OF THE BED CHAMBER
LOWRIE AP PWYL

RETINUE OF LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

MAN AT ARMS MAN AT ARMS MAN AT ARMS MAN AT ARMS
BANNERET MAN AT ARMS MAN AT ARMS BANNERET

Ellis, with a cavalcade of twelve Companions at Arms, rides in from the other side, followed by a religious procession and School of Bards. The two processions meet; and Ellis and his companions dismount and uncover while the bride and bridegroom are blest by the Priest. Ellis kneels to kiss Margaret's hand.

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Ellis. The happiest day that ever dawned on Wales
Is that which brings thee, Margaret. See, thy husband
Comes no harsh master but thy kneeling slave.
Margaret. Master for life, dear husband. Mount and ride.
Ellis. Shall I obey my tongue-tied queen or pause?
What dawning thoughts have called the rosy clouds
Across that lovely cheek, one moment back
As white as wintry Snowdon?
Margaret. Spare me, Ellis.
If I am queen then mount and ride with me.
Ellis. To church or home or death at Margaret's word.

(*They re-mount, and the whole procession rides off in pairs, Ellis and Margaret leading.*)

Ellis. Why silent, Mistress bride? That merry tongue,
That twittered night and day like birds in trees,
Has it no word of all its wealth for me?
You seem like one who gazed with second sight.
Margaret. Perhaps I do, dear Ellis. Is it vision,
Or the wild dream of a much moved girl bride?
The low, encircling hills round this green valley,
What cover them, my husband?
Ellis. Shrubs and trees.
Margaret. So I believed, but now they seem alive
With hazy forms, that, many thousand strong,
Gaze down on us. They look not of our age,
And yet our bridal seems to make them glad.
Are they ghosts or are we? Their eyes are kind,
And a low murmuring ripple of applause
Blows down the wind to greet us. Ellis, hark!
Something they said of children born of us.
Ellis. Nothing is there but trees that wave in wind.
Your hand, sweet bride. This dream, if dream it were,
Was a good omen. Hush, the bards begin.

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